Chapter 11

Learning All the Time and Everywhere: Moving Beyond the Hype of the Mobile Learning Quick Fix

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ABSTRACT

We are witnessing some of the most significant advancements of technology in most aspects of society, but our educational institutions are still mired in the industrial and information processing models of the nineteenth century. Why? We have used technology as a quick fix and ignored the fact that established organizations are dominated by nineteenth century organizational and management structures and cultures that prevent the effective adoption of twenty-first century technologies. In this chapter, we argue that we can break this cycle of wasteful implementation of educational technology by focusing on learning all the time and everywhere and by shifting our instructional practices away from the command and control teacher-centered perspective to the learner-centered perspective. This shift gives the learner choice, ownership, and voice through authentic learning opportunities that enables them to use technology to learn how to learn and adapt to the challenges of the future.

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INTRODUCTION

In too many cases, we bolt new technologies on top of current learning tools in the standard learning environment, which effectively means we give our kids a thousand-dollar pencil. – Alan November (2013, p. 6).

If you have spent any time at all engaged in exploring how to use technology to enhance the learning environment, then you will recognize that November’s lament is one that the educational establishment either chooses to ignore or simply is not capable of making the systemic changes required to really take advantage of the power of technology. Why is this such a persistent problem or more importantly, what can we do to address this shortcoming and genuinely use technology as a catalyst for meaningful change? One of my undergraduate philosophy professors shared an analogy with me that I have returned to time and time again to help me understand the broader picture on how change works and more importantly how one can influence change. He used the example of a white glove and a pail of mud and asked a key question. If we take a white glove and place it on our hand and then fully immerse our gloved hand in the mud, does the glove get mudded or does the mud get gloved? Obviously, the glove gets mudded.

This is a key analogy to keep in mind as we explore why powerful and potentially transforming mobile technologies often have little impact on our educational system. Harvard researcher, Shoshana Zuboff (1988, 1991), points to over a dozen years of research that confirm that the biggest obstacle to successfully implementing technology is not the technology itself but with the fact that well-established organizations are dominated by nineteenth century organizational and management structures and cultures that prevent the effective adoption of twenty-first century technologies. Zuboff also argues that to successfully implement twenty-first century technology you need to do so within a twenty-first century organization. As we know from the past several decades of educational reform research our north American educational institutions are still mired in the industrial and information processing models of the nineteenth century. So, using our analogy of the glove when we introduce mobile technology into this environment, the mobile technology has little impact because it essentially gets muddled by the culture and practices of our antiquated educational system.

BACKGROUND

Moving away from analogies, all we have to do is look Cuban’s (1993) seminal article Computers Meet Classroom: Classroom Wins and the body of Cuban’s work and research to see that Zuboff’s warning needs to be heeded by our educational systems. Cuban has been arguing for several decades that we are wasting our money on technology by the ways that we are attempting to implement it into our classrooms. Papert (1993) has also warned that what we are doing with technology in our schools is equivalent to strapping a jet engine to a horse cart. This is not a new problem. John Dewey, the father of progressive education, started calling for a complete change to education back in the 1920’s and 30’s (Dewey, 1916, 1938). Bruner (1960, 1961) and Piaget (1964, 1976) also started calling for a full-scale shift in education in the 1950s, and up to the 1980s. As we have seen more recently in the work of many learner-centered advocates, we are still missing the bigger picture and are not making the full-scale system changes that
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